

Stress Less, Work Friendly

By Leigh Branham

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"Doing more with less" has taken its toll on the American worker. A Family and Work survey conducted by *True Careers* reported that 70% of all workers don't think there is a healthy balance between their work lives and their professional lives. A Radcliffe Public Policy Center research study found that 61% of all workers were willing to sacrifice pay in exchange for more personal and family time. Generation X and Y workers in particular are insistent on more time outside of work to live their lives. They want something their parents didn't have—sanity!

Stress and overwork horror stories from the rank and file are commonplace. For example, there are actually companies who offer part-time jobs strictly defined as 40 hours per week and numerous accounts of bosses who won't let employees leave meetings early for family emergencies. Or perhaps you heard about the CEO who scheduled a meeting of 80 managers to discuss implementing a life/work balance plan, then held the meeting on a weekend!

People who work in such cultures of abuse and sacrifice often feel like just one more factor of production, like fuel to be burned, instead of a renewable resource. These kinds of employers push their employees to work at a pace that is not sustainable. Instead of doing everything they can to keep their good people, they accept constant turnover as a cost of doing business. They seem to be saying to their employees, "Go ahead—burn yourself out, and then you can leave." As one employee joked, "My company's version of flex-time is 'work any 18 hours you want.'" The bottom line is workers and employers pay the price in stressful and overworked environments.

The good news is that more employers are wising up and realizing that showing sensitivity to employees' needs actually pays off to the bottom line. When First Horizons Bank allowed some of its branches to adopt flextime, it found that customer retention rates were 7% higher in those offices, and employee retention rates were twice those without flex-time. SAS Institute in Cary, N.C., saves \$67 million per year in avoided turnover costs by constantly dreaming up new ways to take care of their employees with various initiatives such as: investing big bucks up front in an on-site clinic, providing elder care assistance, a company gym, free meals in the cafeteria, and the list goes on and on. In the software industry, which averages 20% voluntary turnover, SAS' voluntary turnover rate averages only 3%!

Outback Steakhouses noticed that their rate of returning customers and the retention rate of their wait staff had both been continually declining. In analyzing possible causes, Outback's senior leaders realized the solution was simple—reduce the number of tables for which each waiter is responsible from four to three. This meant they would temporarily increase staffing and compensation costs, but the change allowed waiters to not be so rushed when dealing with customers, to really listen to them without feeling frazzled, and do the little things that make diners feel well taken care of. As a result,

